

Whooping Crane

Record Number: 98-24

11 Nov 1998

Classification: A-D

3 miles southwest of Plainfield, Bremer Co., IA

Dana Dinnes

IBL 69:34, Dinnes 1999

DOCUMENTATION

Dana Dinnes, dinnes@nstl.gov [2/28/99 jjd]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 69:34

Records Committee: IBL 69:89

Dinnes, D. 1999. Whooping Cranes in Bremer County. Iowa Bird Life 69:104-105.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D, Remarkable.

A-P, Remarkable sighting, undoubtedly due to weather conditions. This species was also reported in Wisconsin and Illinois, and hundreds of Sandhill Cranes were displaced eastward in Iowa at this time.

A-D, The number of birds is pretty incredible, but there is nothing in the description to point away from the ID. Description eliminates pelican and Wood Stork. Now the unanswered question is did this group move to the southeast with one of its members dropping in for a rest near Jester park the following day?

A-D, An exact count is the only detail missing from an unforgettable event.

A-D, Seen at close range and color, shape, and size noted.

A-D, Very strong winds just prior.

After identifying it positively as an ibis, I immediately tried calling the Armstrongs at their home with my cell phone, but received no answer. (They were still out birding.) I then called Jim Dinsmore who was home and was able to come out and observe the ibis. I then tried the Armstrongs again and this time they answered. When I told Eugene why I was calling he stated simply "We'll be there in 45 minutes." I then stayed with the ibis until the Armstrongs arrived, happy not only to share my find with fellow birders but grateful also for them telling me about Harrier Marsh. The ibis fed continuously during the hour and a half that I observed the bird. As far as I know, the ibis was not seen after this date.

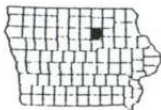
According to Kent and Dinsmore (*Birds in Iowa*, 1996), this is the second sighting of White-faced Ibis in Boone County. There are numerous records of ibis in Iowa in fall but because White-faced and Glossy ibis are virtually identical in basic plumage, most have been identified only as Ibis species. Because I was able to see the bird's red eyes, I was able to identify it as a White-faced Ibis.

15362 250th Avenue, Spirit Lake, IA 51360

✓ WHOOPING CRANES IN BREMER COUNTY

DANA DINNES

On Veteran's Day, 11 November 1998, Larry Brown (an outdoor writer from rural Randall, Iowa) and I were pheasant hunting along a treeless creek line about three miles northeast of Plainfield in Bremer County. It was a crisp, clear morning with a slight breeze. This contrasted markedly from a bit earlier in the week when there were very strong winds--gusts up to 60 mph--from the northwest.



At about 9:00 a.m., while we were headed south along the creek, we heard a strange noise in the air behind us to the north. We turned to see a group of 7 or 8 large birds approaching us. Their call, as Larry described it, sounded like a rusty metal gate swinging in the wind. Since the group of birds were also following the creek line, they were only 40-50 feet directly above us a couple of minutes later. The entire group had similar physical characteristics (as seen from underneath the birds), which were as follows:

- Massive wingspan, a minimum of 6-7 feet
- Long thin necks (over 2 feet long) and long legs that were outstretched in flight
- Small heads
- Bright white plumage with jet black wing tips

We had plenty of time to note these characteristics because their flight was rather slow and labored. They continued to follow the creek, which angled to the south-southeast.

Being an avid outdoorsman and amateur nature photographer, I had a strong inclination that these birds were not common in Iowa. They certainly didn't have the characteristics of egrets, herons, pelicans, or Snow Geese. When I returned home that evening, I looked up the cranes in a bird reference book. The Whooping Crane description and photos were by far the best fit to what we witnessed. I then related this information to Jim Dinsmore at Iowa State University the next day.

It was an incredible experience seeing those magnificent birds fly over us. I just wish I had dismissed the "camera curse" that day. I occasionally bring a camera along on hunting and fishing outings since nearly all of the exciting natural events I've

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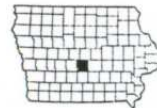
seen happen during those activities. However, when I take the camera along such events don't seem to happen and we usually don't get any shots at our quarry nor catch any fish. I would have gladly given up the daily limit of pheasants I bagged that day for one decent photo of that group of whoopers!

P.O. Box 187, Kelley, IA 50134

WHOOPING CRANE IN POLK COUNTY

JERRY KEYS

The fierce, easterly winds that swept across the Midwest on 10 November 1998 brought a multitude of waterfowl into Iowa. While scouting for geese on 11 November, my hunting partner, Chad Loreth of Polk City, located a few thousand Snow Geese feeding in a chisel-plowed corn field we had permission to hunt southwest of Jester Park in Polk County. We quickly made plans for the following morning and invited Randy Cook of Polk City, to join us.



Arriving before dawn, we set out numerous decoys and anxiously awaited the sun's arrival. Just as we had hoped, the Snow Geese left Saylorville Reservoir as the sun rose and headed to our field.

At 9:30 a.m., with Snow Geese circling overhead, Randy saw a bird to the east heading toward our decoy spread. The bird's long neck and long trailing legs led us to assume it was a Sandhill Crane (many had been seen in the area the previous day). As the bird approached, it began to circle and appeared as if it wanted to land. Chad started to imitate a Sandhill Crane, but when we heard the bird calling, it "purred" and "yelped," which did not sound like a Sandhill. When the bird got within 70 yards, we noticed its body and wings were white except for the ends of the primaries which were black. Also, it was bigger than a Sandhill Crane. The bird eventually flew over us at about 15 yards and briefly landed in our decoys. We were then able to positively identify it as a Whooping Crane. The Whooping Crane lifted off and relanded 300 yards away in the chisel-plowed corn field and fed for about 15 minutes. It was very easy to see the white crane against the plowed field. The crane finally took flight again and headed west.

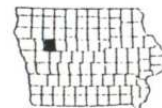
Unfortunately, we did not have a camera with us to take pictures of the Whooping Crane. We did manage to slightly reduce the Snow Goose population, enjoy the great outdoors, and create a once-in-a-lifetime memory.

1106 Westside, Polk City, IA 50226

BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK AT TOMAHAWK MARSH

RUSSELL REISZ

At approximately 8 p.m. on 10 April 1998 I was parked on the country road that bisects Tomahawk Marsh in Sac County. While scanning the eastern portion of the marsh I noticed a large duck flying west, low over the water. I put my binoculars on it and was puzzled by the large white flashes I



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Tue, 17 Nov 1998 17:02:06 -0600
Received: from ccMail by smtpserv.nstl.gov (ccMail Link to SMTP R6.01.01)
id AA911337891; Tue, 17 Nov 98 17:23:04 -0600
Message-Id: <9811179113.AA911337891@smtpserv.nstl.gov>
X-Mailer: ccMail Link to SMTP R6.01.01
Date: Tue, 17 Nov 98 15:20:20 -0600
From: "Dinnes"<dinnes@nstl.gov>
To: <oldcoot@iastate.edu>
Cc: <miclarry@netins.net>
Subject: cranes
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Status: U

Dr. Dinsmore:

Following is a visual account of the birds a friend, Larry Brown, (his e-mail address is that on the CC of this message) and I saw:

When: Wednesday, Nov. 11, 1998
Time: Approximately 9:00 a.m.
Atmospheric Conditions: Clear
Place: About 3 miles southeast of Plainfield, Ia. along a creek

Account:

Larry Brown and I were pheasant hunting the creekline when we heard an odd noise behind us to the north. When we turned around we saw 7-8 large birds, white with black wing tips, approaching us from the distance. A few minutes later they passed only about 40-50 ft. directly overhead of us. Since their flight was rather slow and labored, we had a good view of the underside of the group of birds. Their physical description is:

bright white plumage with jet black wing tips

very wide wingspan

in-flight with long, thin necks (approx. 2 ft. long) and long legs extended

small head

Larry described the call as sounding like that of a swinging, rusty metal gate. I can't think of anything better to describe it than that. The neck was too thin to be that of a pelican. The necks and legs were too long, and the call was much different, than that of snow geese. All of the group of birds were identical in physical description.

Please let me know if there are any other details you would like to know. Hopefully, I and/or Larry can recall those for you.

Larry, if there is anything else you remember about the birds, please relay the information to Dr. Dinsmore and I.

I hope this is descriptive enough to be of value. I only wish I had my camera and zoom lens along to had been able to photograph them.

Dana Dinnes